



## SUCCESS STORY

# Encouraging Volunteerism in Croatia

**USAID supports legal and regulatory reform that strengthen civil society.**



*NGO members of the Working Group on the Draft Law on Volunteerism meet with President Mesić.*

*NGO leaders expect many benefits from the new Law on Volunteerism. "This law will move volunteers from the margin into central focus" in community work, benefiting both volunteers and NGOs.*

*– Duška Milinkovic, Association Mi*

How do you help volunteers cleaning up the trash in the community on the right side of the law?

USAID through the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL) joined forces with partners from Croatian NGOs and the Ministry of Family, Veteran Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity to propose a new law that incorporated international best practices. The law defines volunteer status, differentiates volunteerism from employment and codifies rights and duties to protect both parties in the relationship. For example, the law allows for benefits such as reimbursement of volunteers' travel costs and their legal protection in case of injury. It also protects NGOs from accusations of legal violations that could happen if the state inspectorate treats a volunteer as an employee.

NGO leaders expect many benefits from this new law. Two professionals from volunteer centers in different regions of the country - Lejla Šehić Relić, Director of the Volunteer Centre Osijek and Duška Milinković of Association Mi's Volunteer Support Center in Split - agree that the law will open doors for increasing numbers of people to volunteer in community service projects. As Milinković states, "This law will move volunteers from the margin into the central focus" in community work benefiting both volunteers and NGOs.

With more volunteers, NGOs will be able to expand their services. Society will also benefit. And as expressed by Relić, the Law will "awaken the government to pursue strategies to develop volunteerism through public institutions such as schools and health services."

Based upon the experience of other countries, the enthusiasm of volunteers for their civic involvement may become infectious. If it does, the new Law on Volunteerism will fuel the development of volunteerism and civil society.

Story provided by AED